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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Troops' role in response to virus growing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's role in responding to the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. began to rapidly expand Wednesday as officials announced that two Navy hospital ships and two Army field hospitals were preparing to deploy to help overburdened regions.

The latest moves are aimed at taking the pressure off local hospitals so that they can free up rooms and staff to deal with virus patients. Military hospital ships and field units are geared toward treating trauma cases.

The military moves, however, face limits. It will take as long as two weeks for the USNS Comfort hospital ship to get to New York City, where Gov. An-

drew Cuomo has been pressing for medical help.

And there are logistical and legal concerns about expanding the military's role in civilian affairs, such as tasking it with enforcing quarantines. Defense officials also want to be careful not to do anything to weaken their ability to defend the nation.

The USNS Mercy hospital ship, which is based on the West Coast, will be ready to move out "in days," according to officials, and the USNS Comfort is undergoing maintenance in Norfolk, Va., and will head to New York City within two weeks.

Navy officials are trying to expedite the Comfort's departure. It was not yet clear where

the Mercy will go, but it will be somewhere on the West Coast.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul Friedrichs, the surgeon for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the plan is to staff the ships with the usual mix of medical expertise, which primarily involves trauma treatment. The ships will take non-COVID-19 patients, easing the trauma treatment load on civilian hospitals.

He said that staffing decisions will be based on what local leaders need and will mainly involve active-duty military personnel.

The Army, meanwhile, is preparing to deploy two field hospitals, according to Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy. One defense official said that

the two field hospitals will go to New York City and Seattle, two cities with the greatest need.

Friedrichs said that Army field hospitals will be able to provide about 1,000 beds. He said that they have not put reserve medical units on alert because of concerns about taking those people out of jobs in the health care industry.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Wednesday that 1 million respiratory masks were immediately made available to the Department of Health and Human Services, and 4 million more will follow. The Pentagon will also provide to civilian agencies as many as 2,000 special-purpose military ventilators, he said.

Trump weighs controls on bailed-out firms

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Thursday that the government should take an equity stake in some companies that need bailouts because of devastating effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the U.S. economy.

Trump told a briefing that he has executive authority to curb the impact on businesses.

"There's a lot of executive power," he said. "If we don't have to use it, that would be a good thing, not a bad thing."

Such a move could be an extraordinary reach by government into the private sector. He said that he'd specifically target companies that did stock buybacks, rather than investing in infrastructure. Trump also said that he'd back restrictions on executive bonuses and future buybacks from companies receiving federal support.

Trump reported Thursday on therapeutic drugs that might hold potential down the road to treat those suffering with COVID-19 and stepped up criticism of China for not telling the world earlier about what has become a pandemic.

"More help is on the way," Trump said at a White House briefing on the spread of the virus.

Trump and FDA commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn described several approaches under testing, such as chloroquine, a drug long used to treat malaria, remdesivir, an experimental antiviral that's being tried in at least five separate experiments, and possibly antibodies culled from the blood of COVID-19 patients after they recover. But no new and imminent treatment was announced.

Chloroquine is widely available now and could be used

off-label, but Hahn said that officials want a formal study to get good information on safety and effectiveness.

"We're looking at drugs that are already approved for other indications" as a potential bridge or stopgap until studies are completed on other drugs under investigation, Hahn said. But there remains no proven treatment for the disease, from which most people recover.

Trump, who planned to visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency on Thursday, has invoked rarely used emergency powers to marshal critical medical supplies against the pandemic. He also signed an aid package — which the Senate approved earlier Wednesday — that will guarantee sick leave to workers who fall ill.

Trump jabbed at China, where the virus was first reported, contending: "Could

have been stopped. Could have been stopped pretty easily." He said Chinese officials "didn't decide to make it public" in time to stop the virus from going global.

Trump also said that he would soon invoke a rarely used federal statute that would enable the U.S. to tighten controls along the southwest border because of the virus, based on a recommendation from the U.S. surgeon general.

The president said that the law, intended to halt the spread of communicable diseases, would give authorities "great latitude" to help control the outbreak. Earlier, U.S. officials told The Associated Press that the administration would invoke the law to immediately turn back all people who cross the border illegally from Mexico and to refuse people the right to claim asylum there.

Coalition to suspend mission to train Iraqis

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

The U.S.-led coalition in Iraq has paused training activities and begun pulling some international troops from the country because of concerns about the rapidly spreading coronavirus, military officials said Thursday.

A “reduced requirement for training” and a pause in Operation Inherent Resolve and NATO training missions in Iraq following the outbreak has led the United Kingdom to re-deploy some of its personnel, that country’s defense ministry said in a statement.

The Inherent Resolve training mission has been paused for 60 days, it said.

Despite the unspecified number of troop reductions, “the UK will retain key military personnel throughout the country to ensure the Iraqi Government, Global Coalition and UK national interests are appropriately supported,” it said.

Iraq has had about 150 coronavirus cases and 12 deaths so far, but neighboring Iran has been hard hit by the virus, with more than 17,300 reported cases and some 1,130 deaths, the latest World Health Organization data show.

The Iraqi government has suspended flights to airports in the country through Tuesday and instituted curfews to keep residents of Baghdad, Irbil and elsewhere in their homes to try to stall the spread of the virus. Exceptions are made for emergencies or work such as security and health care, a U.N. humanitarian agency in the country has said. Religious gatherings have also been banned.

Military personnel would be sent out of Baghdad to Kuwait or home, a coalition security official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the plans.

Afghanistan deployments halted amid virus concerns

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S.-led NATO mission in Afghanistan has stopped deploying troops to the country and has placed about 1,500 newly arrived service members and civilians into quarantine to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, military officials said Thursday.

The new measures mean some troops already in Afghanistan will have their deployments extended, a NATO Resolute Support statement said.

The announcement comes after some U.S. lawmakers last week voiced concerns that U.S. troops in Afghanistan were not properly protected from the pandemic.

The Resolute Support mission, which advises and assists Afghan security forces, said Thursday it was establishing screenings to test troops before they are sent to Afghanistan.

More training of Afghan forces will also be done online to help prevent the spread of the virus, the statement said.

NATO emphasized that the new arrivals in quarantine are there as a precaution and “not because they are sick.”

“Our priorities are clear: protecting the force and protecting our collective national interests,”

the statement said.

As of Thursday, 21 Resolute Support personnel exhibiting flu-like symptoms were receiving medical care in isolation, NATO said.

So far, no coalition member has tested positive for the virus, a Resolute Support spokesman said.

The military in Afghanistan does not have a lab and sends test samples to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, as well as civilian facilities.

Last week, Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., and Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., said troops from their state deployed to Afghanistan were experiencing symptoms of the disease but were denied testing.

The lawmakers’ statements came amid rising concerns of a coronavirus outbreak in Afghanistan, which borders Iran, one of countries most affected by the virus.

The situation in Iran has triggered thousands of Afghan refugees to return to their home country every day and health officials say some are bringing the virus back with them.

Afghanistan has 22 confirmed cases of coronavirus, Wahidullah Mayar, spokesman for the nation’s health ministry, said Thursday.

Stars and Stripes reporters Chad Garland and Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.

Virus adds to Afghanistan uncertainty

The Washington Post

KABUL, Afghanistan — With Afghanistan hovering between peace and war, and the government paralyzed by a tense political power struggle, it took a while for the coronavirus to become a reality for Afghans.

Some said they thought the virus was a false rumor or a harmless flu; others believed it would affect only “godless” countries.

But over the past several days, with 22 cases of the coronavirus confirmed nationwide, the impact of the pandemic has begun to hit home. Now, the divided government and its desperately poor health system must grapple with a crisis that is bringing life to a halt in the West — and it must do so while contending with a militant group vying for power across half of the country.

The country’s 22 cases have been linked to Afghans returning from next-door Iran, a country that has been hit hard by the virus, with nearly 1,000 deaths.

Pakistan, another neighboring country and a crucial source of imports, closed its border with Afghanistan this week, sending food prices skyrocketing and panicked shoppers emptying

markets. Pakistan has also has a sharp spike in coronavirus cases, to nearly 200 over the past week, most linked to Shiite pilgrims returning from Iran.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has recently been preoccupied with other problems. Last month, he was declared the winner in September elections, but his rival, Abdullah Abdullah, insisted that he was the real winner and has vowed to form a “parallel” government. Meanwhile, Taliban leaders have suspended planned talks with Afghans about the country’s future until Ghani agrees to free 5,000 imprisoned insurgents.

On Tuesday, though, the president made a live televised appeal to the nation for calm and patience.

“Please do not listen to rumors. With the grace of God ... our country is not facing any essential food shortages,” Ghani cried.

The country’s greatest problem now is its poor health care system, which is far from adequate to serve the impoverished country of 25 million under normal circumstances. Experts and health officials said it is even less prepared to test, treat and care for coronavirus victims.

Navy halts fitness tests over virus worries

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Sailors who were getting ready to take their physical readiness test in the spring will now have more time to practice their pushups after the Navy canceled the assessments due to the coronavirus outbreak, the service announced Wednesday.

The assessments require sailors to be in close contact to conduct the exercise tests and physical measurements. The

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends people maintain a social distance of about six feet to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Every sailor and reservist is required to have the physical fitness assessment twice a year — in the spring between January and June and in the fall between July and December. The assessment includes the physical readiness test and the body composition assessment.

During the physical readiness test, sailors do pushups,

situps and a cardio event, such as a run. The situp event requires a sailor have their feet held down by another sailor to secure them. During the body composition assessment, sailors have their weight recorded and, if necessary, they are physically measured to check body fat estimates to ensure they meet the Navy's height and weight requirements.

Commands who have started or already completed their testing are asked to stop and not to add the test information

in the Physical Readiness Information Management System, according to the Navy announcement.

The Navy is also directing all commands to immediately stop organized and group physical training programs until further notice. There are exceptions to this policy, such as if a person is in recruit training or the unit's mission training requires it, according to the announcement.

Navy relaxes grooming rules to help stop virus spread

BY THERON GODBOLD

Stars and Stripes

The Navy is allowing commanding officers to temporarily relax some hair-grooming standards to help curb the spread of the coronavirus, according to a message issued Thursday by the chief of naval operations.

The idea is to promote social distancing — something that's difficult to do when sit-

ting in a barber's chair.

Commanders may tolerate longer, bulkier hair on the top, back and sides, but "at no time will relaxed grooming interfere with the proper wearing of Navy head gear and proper use of protective personal equipment (helmets, masks, hoods, etc.)," the message states.

However, regulations on hairstyles, facial hair and sideburns still hold sway.

That means only neat and closely trimmed mustaches and no beards.

"Good judgment of leaders at all levels of the chain of command is required to ensure all possible [coronavirus] force health protection precautions are being taken," Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said in the message.

The order has no expiration date but holds until it's superseded by new guidance.

Naval officer files suit over military transgender ban

Associated Press

BOSTON — A U.S. naval officer who is facing involuntary discharge because of a policy restricting transgender people from military service has filed a lawsuit that aims to force defense officials to allow her to continue serving.

The federal lawsuit, filed Tuesday, is the first legal challenge to the policy since rules went into effect in April 2019, stripping transgender troops of rights they secured under the Obama administration to serve openly and to have their medical transitions covered in their health benefits, lawyers said.

The officer, a transgender woman stationed in Massachusetts, is seeking to transition and serve in the Navy as a woman, the lawsuit says.

'There is absolutely no justification for discharging somebody who... wants to continue to serve.'

Jennifer Levi

transgender rights director for GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders

"This is a moment when we need all hands on deck, and there is absolutely no justification for discharging somebody who is continuing to meet all standards and wants to continue to serve," said Jennifer Levi, transgender rights director for GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders.

A Department of Defense spokeswoman said that it is aware of the lawsuit and is reviewing the filings.

Under the new policy, people

who have undergone gender transition are banned from enlisting, and military members who come out as transgender and seek a transition face discharge. Service members must serve under the gender they were assigned at birth unless they began a transition under less restrictive Obama administration rules.

Four other lawsuits seeking to overturn the policy are pending in court and are expected to go to trial, but the Supreme

Court last year ruled that the ban could go into effect while the cases continued.

The latest lawsuit only seeks relief for the officer, who is not named in legal documents to "minimize risk to her," her lawyers said.

The officer has served for nearly a decade, including two extended tours as a surface warfare officer, according to her complaint. She was diagnosed with gender dysphoria two months after the policy went into effect in April 2019 and told her commanding officer she is transgender shortly after, her lawyers said. "Lieutenant Doe is now subject to discharge for being who she is, unrelated to her fitness to serve in the military," the lawsuit says.

Italian death toll overtakes China's total

Associated Press

ROME — The death toll in Italy from the coronavirus overtook China's on Thursday in a stark illustration of how the outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States.

Italy, with a population of 60 million, recorded at least 3,405 deaths, or roughly 150 more than in China — a country with a population over 20 times larger.

Italy reached the bleak milestone the same day that Wuhan, the Chinese city where the coronavirus first emerged three months ago, recorded no new infections, a sign that the communist country's draconian lockdowns were a powerful method to stop the virus' spread.

Meanwhile, the virus appeared to be opening an alarming new front in Africa, where in less than three weeks it has spread to 35 countries.

The epidemic has also now reached at least one European head of state, 62-year-old Prince Albert II of the tiny principality of Monaco. The palace announced that he tested positive for the virus but was continuing to work from his office and was being treated by doctors from Princess Grace Hospital, named after his American actress mother.

The worldwide death toll crept toward 10,000 as the total number of infections topped 220,000, including nearly 85,000

people who have recovered.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe pleaded with people to keep their distance from one another to avoid spreading the virus, even as the crisis pushed them to seek comfort.

"When you love someone, you should avoid taking them in your arms," he said in Parliament. "It's counterintuitive, and it's painful. The psychological consequences, the way we are living, are very disturbing — but it's what we must do."

The American death toll rose to 160, primarily elderly people.

Health authorities have cited a variety of reasons for Italy's high toll, key among them its large population of elderly people, who are particularly susceptible to serious complications from the virus, though severe cases have also been seen in younger patients. Italy has the world's second-oldest population, and the vast majority of its dead — 87% — were over 70.

Jonas Schmidt-Chanasit, a virologist at Germany's Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, said Italy's high death rate could be explained in part by the almost total breakdown of the health system in some areas.

"That's what happens when the health system collapses," he said.

On a visit to the northern city of Milan, the head of a Chinese Red Cross delegation helping advise Italy said he was shocked to

see so many people walking around, using public transportation and eating out.

Sun Shuopeng said Wuhan saw infections peak only after a month of a strictly enforced lockdown.

"Right now we need to stop all economic activity and we need to stop the mobility of people," he said. "All people should be staying at home in quarantine."

Aside from the elderly and the sick, most people have mild or moderate symptoms, like a fever or cough, and most recover in a matter of weeks.

Spain has been the hardest-hit European country after Italy, and in Madrid a four-star hotel began operating as a makeshift hospital for coronavirus patients.

The director of the group that runs the Ayre GH Colon hotel tweeted: "365 rooms more to help win the war."

The Madrid Hotel Business Association said it has placed 40 hotels with room for 9,000 people at the service of the Madrid region, which has near half of Spain's 17,000 or so cases.

In London, home to almost 9 million, the government urged people to stay off public transportation as authorities considered imposing tougher travel restrictions.

Thursday marked the first time since Jan. 20 that Wuhan showed no new locally transmitted cases, a rare glimmer of hope and perhaps a lesson in the strict measures needed to contain the virus.

DODEA issues Japan school closures after complaints

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — After parents complained of a decision to continue classes despite the coronavirus pandemic, Defense Department schools in Japan announced Thursday they will temporarily close next week.

Friday will be the last day of classes for students at schools on military installations across Japan and Okinawa, Department of Defense Education Activity Pacific East Superintendent Judy Allen said in a letter to parents Thursday.

Instruction is slated to restart on April 13.

The news comes a day after Stars and Stripes published a story about parents' frustrations over Allen's comments during the virtual town hall that DODEA did not plan to imminently close its schools in Japan despite similar closures in the region due to concerns over coronavirus. Public schools in Japan closed March 2.

During the town hall, Allen told parents she did not know if a positive case of coro-

navirus at a school would cause a decision to close DODEA schools in Japan.

"We are looking at the situation that we have, I don't know what the situation will be when it occurs," Allen said during the Tuesday town hall. "We will follow our medical guidance and act accordingly."

DODEA on Wednesday shut down its U.S. schools, including those on Guam. DODEA schools in South Korea have been closed since Feb. 26.

Some parents, such as Navy spouse Amy Cheatham Hayes, were happy that DODEA ultimately decided to close its Japan schools.

"I'm really glad they've decided to make the responsible choice," she said. "A good poker player knows how to fold no matter how many chips they've contributed to the pot."

However, some fifth-grade and Sure Start students at Yokosuka's Sullivans Elementary School were later told not to return Friday after officials learned that two students had been tested for the virus, according to a DODEA announcement posted to the school's official Facebook page.

Parents of children in the two grades were directed to keep them home until the results of those tests are available, said the announcement posted late Thursday.

Cheatham Hayes, whose husband is deployed aboard the USS Blue Ridge, has three children who attend Ikego Elementary School at the Ikego Housing Area and one who attends Yokosuka Middle School.

"We don't need to wait for COVID-19 to show up in our schools," she added. "It would be too late at that point."

The decision to close the schools aligns with a policy of social distancing — individuals staying at least six feet apart — to stem the virus' spread. As of Thursday, no service members, DOD civilians or their families in Japan have tested positive for coronavirus.

The schools will undergo a thorough cleaning during the temporary closure, "which would not be possible while students are in the building," Allen said in the letter.

Students will instead have online learning options available starting Wednesday through April 2, Allen said in the letter.

Inmates seek release citing virus fears

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Coronavirus has become a “get out of jail” card for hundreds of low-level inmates across the country, and even hard-timers are seeking freedom with the argument that it’s not a matter of if but when the deadly illness sweeps through tightly packed populations behind bars.

Among those pleading for compassionate release or home detention are the former head of the Cali drug cartel, President Donald Trump’s former personal attorney Michael Cohen, Ponzi schemer Bernard Madoff and dozens of inmates at New York City’s Rikers Island, part of a jail system that lost an employee to the virus this week.

“He is in poor health. He is 81 years old,” David Oscar Markus, the attorney for cocaine kingpin Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela, wrote in emergency court papers this week seeking his release after serving about half of a 30-year drug-trafficking sentence. “When (not if) COVID-19 hits his prison, he will not have much of a chance.”

While widespread outbreaks of coronavirus behind bars have yet to happen, the frenzy of legal activity underscores a crude reality that’s only beginning to sink in: America’s nearly 7,000 jails, prisons and correction facilities are an ideal breeding ground for the virus, as danger-

ous as nursing homes and cruise ships but far less sanitary.

Stepped-up cleanings and a temporary halt to visitations at many lockups across the country in the midst of the crisis can’t make up for the fact that ventilation behind bars is often poor, inmates sleep in close quarters and share a small number of bathrooms.

“Simply put, it’s impossible to do social distancing,” said David S. Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor in Miami.

The 81-year-old Madoff, who is serving a 150-year sentence for bilking thousands of investors in a \$17.5 billion Ponzi scheme, had just asked last month to be released early in light of his terminal kidney disease. Now his attorney is calling on all at-risk federal prisoners to be released for their own safety because of the coronavirus.

“The federal prison system has consistently shown an inability to respond to major crises,” Madoff attorney Brandon Sample told The Associated Press. “My concerns are even more amplified for prisoners at federal medical centers and those who are aged.”

As of Wednesday, two federal Bureau of Prisons staff members have tested positive for coronavirus, a person familiar with the matter told the AP. One of the staffers works in a correctional facility in Berlin, N.H., and the other works in an office in Grand Prairie, Texas, but there were

still no confirmed cases among any of the 175,000 inmates in the BOP system, the person said. The person, who wasn’t authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity, would not say how many inmates, if any, have been tested for coronavirus.

Michael Avenatti, the once high-flying lawyer who was recently convicted of trying to extort Nike, asked a judge Wednesday to release him to home confinement. A court motion said Avenatti was particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus in part because his cellmate in Manhattan’s Metropolitan Correctional Center was removed from his cell due to flu-like symptoms.

It’s not just attorneys for the wealthy and powerful seeking release.

In New York, public defenders asked judges to release older and at-risk inmates from the city’s beleaguered federal jails, saying pretrial confinement “creates the ideal environment for the transmission of contagious disease.” The motions cite a provision of the Bail Reform Act allowing for the temporary release of pretrial inmates under “compelling” circumstances.

Mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday that over the next 48 hours the city will identify any inmates held in minor charges it thinks should be released because of their health. “We’ve got to balance, here, public safety with the very real concern about health in the jails.”

California to spend \$150 million to protect homeless

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — As worries about the spread of the coronavirus confine millions of Californians to their homes, concern is growing about those who have no homes in which to shelter.

California has more than 150,000 homeless people, the most in the nation, and there’s concern that as the rest of the state’s residents are being told to stay apart and to frequently wash their hands, the homeless are living just as they did before the outbreak.

Gov. Gavin Newsom on Wednesday said it’s possible 60,000 could contract the virus. The governor announced he would spend \$150 million on efforts to prevent the COVID-19 virus from sweeping through

that population.

“I hope you get a sense of the seriousness we’re taking the issue of homelessness,” Newsom said in a Facebook Live broadcast.

Two-thirds of the money will go directly to local governments to spend on homeless services and \$50 million will be used by the state to purchase 1,300 travel trailers and lease hotel rooms for emergency housing.

The trailers will be used for homeless people requiring isolation after testing positive for the virus or who are showing symptoms. California also has identified 950 hotels that could lease rooms to local governments to house the homeless.

In Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti announced that the city, through the Red Cross,

will provide 6,000 emergency beds at recreation centers, including 1,600 by week’s end.

“Too many ... lack a basic necessity that will help most of us get through this crisis: a home,” Garcetti said.

LA has an estimated 27,000 of the county’s 60,000 homeless people. Garcetti said the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority will be asked to identify 4,000 people throughout the county who are most at risk from the virus because of their age or medical conditions.

People in shelters who have virus symptoms will be taken to receive medical care, Garcetti said.

To date, the city hasn’t confirmed any virus cases among homeless people, who are difficult to test and treat because

they may move frequently or refuse medical care. However, “they are the ones who disproportionately could die as a result of this crisis,” Garcetti said.

The city also has set up hundreds of hand-washing stations and mobile toilets at homeless encampments and the City Council voted Tuesday to suspend an ordinance requiring homeless people to take down their tents during the day so that transients can at least shelter there.

The California Department of Public Health said Wednesday that the state now has 13 deaths related to the virus and more than 700 confirmed cases. More than 11,900 people are self-monitoring after returning from overseas.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Stun gun used on suspect after chase

WA EVERETT — A suspect driving a reportedly stolen car in Washington state was stunned by deputies following a vehicle pursuit and foot race near south Everett, authorities said.

The 33-year-old man eluded a Snohomish County sheriff's deputy Tuesday by speeding away, darting into parking lots and dodging multiple pursuit intervention technique attempts, the Daily Herald reported.

Pursuing officers ultimately caused the vehicle to spin and crash into a cement barrier. The suspect then fled on foot, authorities said.

A deputy pursued and struggled with the suspect until another deputy arrived and used a stun gun on the man, authorities said. The man was taken to the hospital, then booked into the Snohomish County Jail.

Boys come to aid of woman in icy pond

MN BROOKLYN PARK — First responders and others are praising two young boys who came to the aid of a Minnesota woman who broke through the ice on a pond near her home.

Sheree Risvold was chasing after her son, Jameson, 5, last Sunday. The child has autism and is fascinated by water.

Jameson was watching Emerson Olson, 14, and his brother, Everett, 11, play basketball at Brook Oaks Park on Sunday when he took off running for the nearby pond. Risvold told the Star Tribune she broke through the ice after following Jameson onto the pond.

The boy's sisters ran to the Olson brothers for help.

Emerson, who wants to be a doctor, called 911 and then Risvold's husband while Ever-

ett held onto Jameson.

First responders arrived quickly and rescued Risvold.

The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office plans to nominate the boys for life-saving awards.

Man jailed twice for impersonating cop

FL BUNNELL — A Florida man is back in jail for impersonating a law enforcement officer just days after he was arrested for the exact same charge, sheriff's officials said.

LeRoy Stotelmyer, 60, was arrested March 11 after investigators got a tip from a toll bridge attendant who showed them video of the man flashing a law enforcement badge twice on March 11 to avoid paying a \$2 toll, the Flagler County Sheriff's Office said in a Facebook post. On-duty officers are allowed to cross free of charge.

A toll booth attendant told investigators that Stotelmyer flashed the silver badge at him, and he in turn showed the man an article about his arrest for impersonating an officer. He said Stotelmyer then put away the badge and paid the toll.

Sheriff Rick Staly said Stotelmyer was arrested March 9 on charges of impersonating an officer and shoplifting. On March 11 he was charged with felony violation of pre-trial release and impersonating an officer.

Baby gray seal rescued from state park beach

DE LEWES — A baby seal has been rescued on one of Delaware's beaches.

The News Journal reported that the young gray seal was recovered Tuesday on the beach at Cape Henlopen State Park near Lewes.

Suzanne Thurman, executive director of Marine Education,

Research and Rehabilitation Institute, and a small team of volunteers worked closely together during the rescue. The rescuers named the animal Finnigan in honor of St. Patrick's Day.

Thurman said the seal is probably about one month old. It was suffering from what appeared to be two wounds on its back. The rescuers plan to find a rehabilitation center to help the seal recover.

Police: No one hit by shots fired in grocery

NE OMAHA — Shots were fired in the parking lot and inside an Omaha grocery store Tuesday evening, but there were no shooting victims and a suspect is in custody, police said.

Police and medics were called to the Hy-Vee store on the city's southwest side just after 6:30 p.m. The suspect was taken to a hospital with minor injuries, Omaha police Deputy Chief Ken Kanger said. A woman also suffered minor injuries while fleeing the scene, he said.

A man in his 20s spent about 30 minutes parked outside the store before opening fire on vehicles at the pharmacy drive-through window, Kanger said. He then entered the store pharmacy area and opened fire. An off-duty officer and a customer grabbed the man and subdued him after a scuffle for the gun.

Man says he doesn't remember stealing TVs

NM GALLUP — A New Mexico man is facing charges after he told police he unknowingly stole two televisions while drunk.

The Gallup Independent reported Sage Aaron Cummins, 24, was arrested last week shortly following his arrival to

the victim's apartment to return the TVs.

According to Gallup police, an officer was investigating a burglary report when Cummins approached him and admitted he had stolen the televisions from the victim's home. Cummins told police he was "very intoxicated" when he entered the residence.

A police report says Cummins said he only remembered knocking on the door and, when it was apparent that no one was home, he entered the residence. Cummins says he did not remember what happened after that. Cummins was informed two days later who the televisions belonged to by a mutual friend of his and the victim.

Grenade on display at Gettysburg destroyed

PA GETTYSBURG — A World War II-era grenade that had been on display in a museum at the Gettysburg battlefield in central Pennsylvania was recently removed and destroyed, officials said.

The Eisenhower National Historic Site said the grenade had been on display since March 2018 in an exhibit at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center titled "Eisenhower's Leadership from Camp Colt to D-Day." Officials identified the grenade as a Mark II Fragmentation Grenade with a M10A3 Fuse, a common armament that would have been used during the June 1944 D-Day assaults on Omaha and Utah beaches in Normandy, France.

Officials say the grenade was identified during a National Park Service survey of historic armaments in park museum collections, and staff members determined that it "could not be conclusively proven to be active or inactive."

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

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Bears acquire '18 Super Bowl MVP Foles

Associated Press

LAKE FOREST, Ill. — The Chicago Bears added competition for quarterback Mitchell Trubisky by trading for 2018 Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles.

They also brought in a former All-Pro to boost their pass rush by agreeing to a five-year, \$70 million contract with Robert Quinn and have another former star on the way in tight end Jimmy Graham.

It's been a busy few days for a team looking to bounce back from a disappointing season that began with Super Bowl hopes. And while the NFL's new year kicked off Wednesday without the usual parade of official announcements because of concerns about the new coronavirus, the Bears all but confirmed the stories that leaked out.

They sent out three tweets citing NFL Network reports

of the trade with Jacksonville for Foles and agreements with Quinn and Graham. In each one, the Bears added: "NFL policy currently prohibits teams from making any official announcements."

On Thursday, the NFL changed course and said it was allowing teams to announce agreements they have reached with free agents as well as trades.

The league has barred free agents from traveling to team facilities as well as travel by team personnel to meet them. Contracts can be sent digitally, signed by players, returned to teams and then submitted to the league to make them official. But the players also need physicals.

They could get them locally, but few teams would be comfortable with that arrangement. Changes were expected for the Bears. After all, they went

from winning the NFC North at 12-4 in 2018 to finishing 8-8 and missing the playoffs for the eighth time in nine years.

Trubisky, for one, might be a little less comfortable.

Though general manager Ryan Pace had said he remained committed to the former No. 2 overall draft pick as the starter, he also left the door open to bringing in a veteran to push him. The Bears agreed Wednesday to send a compensatory fourth-round pick to Jacksonville for Foles, according to a person familiar with the situation.

Trubisky's yards (3,138), completion rate (63.2%), touchdowns (17) and rating (83) were all down from the previous year. And the Bears' offense ranked among the worst in the NFL.

The Jaguars are parting with the 31-year-old Foles just over a year after signing him to a

four-year, \$88 million contract that included \$50.125 million guaranteed. He broke his left collarbone early in the season opener, missed the next eight games and got benched in his third game back.

Rookie Gardner Minshew played well enough in his absence to make Foles expendable.

Also:

■ The Lions agreed to trade cornerback Darius Slay to the Philadelphia Eagles, ending the standout defensive back's seven-year stint in Detroit.

Agent Drew Rosenhaus confirmed the trade Thursday and that Slay has agreed to a three-year, \$50 million extension with Philadelphia. The Lions drafted Slay 36th overall in 2013, and he earned All-Pro honors in 2017.

Slay has 19 interceptions in his NFL career, including two last season.

Silver: NBA looking at games utilizing quarantined players

Associated Press

The NBA is considering an idea where some players would be quarantined or isolated for purposes of being able to compete against one another and provide basketball fans with some sort of diversion from the coronavirus pandemic.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver revealed that notion as one of several items under consideration by the league right now during the shutdown caused by the pandemic. Silver made the comments in a televised interview on ESPN.

"Maybe it's for a giant fundraiser or just for the collective good of the people," Silver said. "You take a subset of players and is there a protocol in which they can be tested and quarantined and isolated in some way. ... People are stuck at home. They need a diversion. They need to be entertained."

Silver offered no predictions on when NBA games would resume. He said the league may, when conditions allow, resume games but without fans — a move the league was going to make last week before Utah's Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19 and prompted the league to go on what it thought would be a hiatus, not a stoppage that is certain to reach multiple weeks and likely months.

Silver, as he often does, said he hopes the NBA can be a conduit to spark positive change in the country — especially now when there will be a real need.

"One thing I'll say about the United States ... we're an incredible country and some of the greatest inventions, some of the best innovations, some of the best minds are in this country," Silver said. "And I'm sure as people are sitting home but still working they're thinking of these various things like how can we restart the economy and what role can the NBA play?"

Silver also said he doesn't know when play can return. The NBA has said the shutdown will be at least 30 days, though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has subsequently said it recommends no gatherings of more than 50 people take place before mid-May.

"I don't have a good enough sense of how long a period this is going to be," Silver said.

In other matters Silver discussed:

Team testing: Silver said eight full NBA teams have been tested for the coronavirus, which is more than was previously known, as well as members of other teams who were showing symptoms. The Brooklyn Nets, Oklahoma City Thunder, Utah Jazz and Toronto Raptors have said publicly that they have been tested; the Los An-

geles Lakers indicated Tuesday that they would be tested. The Detroit Pistons said a player was tested; that player, according to a person with knowledge of the situation, was Christian Wood, who tested positive.

Silver stood by the decisions teams were making to get tested even amid criticism.

"People were not taking these protocols all that seriously until the NBA did what it did," Silver said.

No predictions: Silver would not offer a percentage guess as to his level of certainty that play will resume this season.

"I'm optimistic by nature and I want to believe that we'll be able to salvage at least some portion of this season," Silver said.

Silver said the league will "try by every means that we can" to play basketball again soon, though insisted that public health officials will sign off on any resumption plan first.

Asked by ESPN host Rachel Nichols if the league would crown scoring leader James Harden of the Houston Rockets the scoring champion if the season wouldn't resume or if the league would go ahead with voting for the traditional end-of-season awards, Silver said "I'm not there yet. We'll figure it out. I hope I'm not just in denial, but I'm just not there yet."

Flame arriving amid calls for delay

Associated Press

TOKYO — The Olympic flame is set to arrive in Japan from Greece even as the opening of the Tokyo Games in four months is in doubt with more voices calling for the event to be postponed or canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The flame was scheduled to touch down Friday aboard a white aircraft painted with the inscription “Tokyo 2020 Olympic Torch Relay” on its side, and “Hope Lights Our Way” stenciled near the tail section.

Everything about the arrival ceremony at the Matsushima air base in northern Japan was to be subdued. The flame was to be greeted by a few dignitaries, saluted by a flyover from an aerial acrobatic team — if weather permitted — and then used to ignite a cauldron.

The burning vessel will be displayed in three northern prefectures before the official relay begins on March 26 from Fukushima prefecture, which was devastated nine years ago by an earthquake, tsunami and the meltdown of three nuclear reactors.

Thousands of people from the region are

still in temporary housing and life has not returned to normal for many. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hopes to use the Olympics to crown his run as Japan’s longest serving premier, and many suggest he may not be around if the games are put off and the economy slumps.

Taro Aso, the Japanese finance minister and former prime minister, characterized the Tokyo Games as the “cursed Olympics” when speaking on Wednesday in a parliamentary committee. Aso was born in 1940, the year Tokyo was to hold its first Olympics, which were called off because of World War II.

“This isn’t a phrase that the press could like to hear, but it’s true,” said Aso, who was a member of Japan’s shooting team at the 1976 Montreal Olympics.

Aso pointed out that even as the situation in Japan and Asia improves, it’s worse globally.

“We certainly hope to have a situation where everyone can at least come to Japan feeling safe and happy,” Aso said. “But the question is how we do that. It is something that Japan alone cannot achieve, and I don’t

have an answer to this.”

Getting the flame to Japan represents a small victory for the International Olympic Committee and local organizers, who maintain the Olympics will open as scheduled on July 24 and be followed by the Paralympics on Aug. 25.

Even if they don’t, the burning flame could be used as a symbol — particularly if the Games are eventually delayed — and a rallying point for the Japanese public.

In a conference call on Wednesday, IOC president Thomas Bach got support for holding course, but is also getting push back from athletes who can’t train, are confused about the qualification process, and worry about their health. Critics are also complaining about the unfairness of qualifying, which might give some athletes advantages over others.

Tokyo organizers have stripped most of the festivities from the relay, and have asked roadside crowds to be “restrained” and keep their distance from others. If that does not happen, organizers say they could stop the relay, or delay it.

NASCAR tackling rescheduling races

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — NASCAR plans to reschedule the seven Cup Series races already postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Figuring out how to cram the events and the All-Star race into the crowded 36-race schedule could be difficult.

NASCAR has already postponed its season until May 9 at Martinsville Speedway in Virginia. IndyCar suspended its start to the season through the end of April last week, while Formula One has postponed or canceled several events, including last weekend’s opener in Australia.

“These clearly are unprecedented times with information changing by the hour,” NASCAR President Steve Phelps said Tuesday. “Collectively, our industry has made several difficult decisions, all with one thought in mind — the health and safety of our fans, our competitors, employees and ev-

everyone in the industry. The situation we are facing transcends the world of sports. What is most important now is we take precautions to keep everyone as safe as possible during these challenging times.”

Motorsports is in a particularly perilous position without weekly racing because of its financial structure. Teams must find the sponsorship needed to field each car, pay drivers, make payroll for an entire organization and cover additional operating costs. With no events scheduled until May, sponsors may ask for refunds and teams won’t be collecting payouts from purses.

Roger Penske, who in January became owner of IndyCar and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, promised team owners they will receive the first installment payment from the series’ bonus program as planned.

Phelps said NASCAR is still working through those issues.

“We are working with our

teams closely to have them industry wide make sure we are all financially viable moving forward during this postponement of our races,” Phelps said. “Are we concerned about teams broadly and their financial health? Of course we are. We want to make sure that each of our teams gets through this, each of our stakeholders in the industry gets through this crisis as well as we all can.”

As for rescheduling the postponed events — at Atlanta, Homestead-Miami, Texas Motor Speedway, Bristol (Tenn.), Richmond (Va.), Talladega (Ala.) and Dover (Del.) — Phelps said all options are under consideration. That includes midweek races and doubleheaders.

NASCAR does want the postponed events concluded before the start of its playoffs in September, still wants the season to end as planned at Phoenix in November and isn’t sure if it will race during a planned break during the Olympics.

NBA ripped for testing

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — A handful of NBA teams, including the Lakers, have offered coronavirus testing for their players since Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert became the first to test positive March 11, whether they have symptoms or not, providing them a service that isn’t available to the general public.

As more stories emerge of the nationwide shortage of testing, there was a backlash to the teams’ access to testing. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio was among the critics.

“We wish them a speedy recovery,” de Blasio said on Twitter. “But, with all due respect, an entire NBA team should NOT get tested for COVID-19 while there are critically ill patients waiting to be tested. Tests should not be for the wealthy, but for the sick.”